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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: PROGRESS AGAINST POLITICAL KILLINGS

REF: A. 06 MANILA 4811

[B](#). 06 MANILA 4464  
[C](#). 06 MANILA 4359

[1](#). (SBU) Summary. Philippine police have succeeded in filing additional cases in politically-related killings, leading to at least four convictions and dismissals of two police officials. They continue to investigate a large number of other deaths of leftists and journalists claimed by various groups, although they have ruled out many as stemming from other, non-political motives. Many systemic problems and inadequacies remain, which the police reported to the Presidential-level Melo Commission for possible action. (Septel will report on Justice Melo's recommendations to President Arroyo.) A senior military official now participates in the police task force handling these killings. Concerns are growing about additional political violence in the run-up to the May 2007 elections. Police insist that the Philippine government has a "firm policy of protecting democratic space and fundamental liberties," and would not tolerate "the persecution or elimination of radicals, journalists or opponents." End Summary.

#### Progress report

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[2](#). (U) In a meeting with Pol/C and poloffs on February 8, Philippine National Police (PNP) Task Force Usig Commander General Avelino Razon provided an update on its investigations into alleged cases of the slayings of party list/militant group members and journalists over the past five years (reftels). Out of a total of 115 cases involving the former and 26 of the latter as of February 8:  
-- 70 cases have been filed in court (up from 67 in November ref a);  
-- 33 individuals have been arrested in 42 different cases;  
-- four individuals have been convicted (compared to 2 in November);  
-- 71 cases remain under active investigation (66 involving leftists);  
-- two police superintendents were relieved of duties in 2006 due to suspected involvement in such killings;  
-- in a new crackdown on weapons in 2006, police seized 181 "assorted firearms" and 5,420 "illegal weapons" and charged 4,540 suspects in court.

#### Cross-referencing

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[3](#). (U) Task Force Usig obtained (in some cases through third parties) lists of alleged cases compiled by NGOs, including the leftist human right group Karapatan (claiming a total of 783 killings), the International Peasant Solidarity Mission (claiming 22 deaths), Amnesty International (claiming 57 victims), the leftist Bayan Muna political party (claiming

116 deaths), the Government of the Republic of the Philippines' Monitoring Committee on peace talks with the National Democratic Front (claiming 184 deaths), and National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (claiming 45 slain journalists). While there is some overlap on these lists, General Razon said that police investigations had been able to "exclude" 411 cases. In some cases, police succeeded in locating the alleged "victim," still alive. Other cases were directly linked to narcotics, gambling, robbery, or other criminal acts without a political component. In many cases, police determined that the victim had no known party affiliation that would suggest a political motive. Task Force Usig continues to investigate 490 of the claimed additional cases, although Karapatan refuses even to meet with the Task Force, according to General Razon.

#### Patterns

¶4. (SBU) The PNP statistics indicated a concentration of the alleged leftist killings in Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog (eastern Luzon) Regions, with no cases at all in Western or Central Mindanao Regions or in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. General Razon confirmed suspicions that the Luzon killings may be linked to the then-presence of now-retired but still highly controversial Major General Jovito Palparan, although he noted that there was little or no hard evidence directly linking Palparan or units under his command to such killings.

¶5. (U) For journalists, the most dangerous areas included the Southern Tagalog Region but also Western and Central Mindanao. General Razon confirmed that the suspected killers in these handful of cases (only two in 2006, compared to five in 2005 and six in 2004) were officials of Local Government

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Units retaliating against "hard-hitting reporters." Two mayors and two village ("barangay") chairmen have already surrendered, with charges now filed against them. Two police and one soldier have been arrested in other cases.

#### Asking for help

¶6. (SBU) General Razon shared a copy of a November 21 letter he sent to Justice Jose Melo, head of the Presidential-level Commission set up to provide policy recommendations to the government on these "unexplained" killings. His recommendations included:

- stronger police/prosecutor cooperation (General Razon expressed appreciation for U.S. support for a proposed new Executive Order to mandate such cooperation, which remains at Malacanang for signature);
- more robust funding for a Witness Protection program;
- creation of a National Warrant of Arrest registry accessible to all police units nationwide;
- establishment of a National Automated Ballistic Information database to cross-check crimes; and,
- a strengthened rewards system.

¶7. (SBU) General Razon admitted that he had not yet seen the Melo Commission report to the President, but claimed that he remained in "constant coordination" with Justice Melo, who will continue to offer advice to the President. (Pol/C has an appointment to meet with Justice Melo on February 9.)

#### New military component

¶8. (U) Beginning in January 2007, a senior representative of the Armed Forces of the Philippines -- its head of the Civilian Relations Service -- became a part of Task Force Usig. The new member (a Rear Admiral) has shared the AFP's documentation of additional killings allegedly perpetrated by the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army,

which do not fall under the purview of Task Force Usig. According to AFP statistics, since 2000 there have been 1,227 such killings, including:

- 384 AFP and PNP personnel;
- 75 former AFP and PNP personnel;
- 101 government officials;
- 67 rebel returnees and former CPP members; and,
- 599 other civilians.

¶9. (U) Few of these cases have been solved or their perpetrators brought to justice, according to the AFP. General Razon clarified that the PNP's Inter-Agency Illegal Action Group worked with AFP to investigate these cases, but reluctance of witnesses to testify remained a significant impediment to bringing culprits to justice.

#### Next steps

¶10. (SBU) In 2007, Task Force Usig will concentrate on filing charges in at least 50 pct of all confirmed cases involving leftists (the ratio now is 43 pct), as well as additional cases involving journalists (where 81 pct of cases already have charges filed), according to General Razon. He continues to push for a required re-registration of all firearms, which would provide not only updated data on who has which guns but also additional revenues that would fund the Task Force's activities. He said that he continued to work with the Department of Interior and Local Government to ensure issuance of the proposed Executive Order on police/prosecutor cooperation, but in the meantime has strengthened informal police links with the Department of Justice to ensure preparation of stronger legal cases with adequate evidence. He noted that the PNP had succeeded in obtaining a commitment from the National Sweepstakes Organization to provide about 20 million pesos (about USD400,000) in annual funding for the PNP's Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, which General Razon said should help the PNP move many more cases from the investigation stage to actual filing of legal charges against suspects.

¶11. (U) General Razon admitted concerns that political violence related to the May 14 national, provincial, and local elections were high, which the PNP hopes to mitigate by strict enforcement of a special gun ban from the Commission on Elections during the campaign cycle, as well as by tougher checkpoints in violence-prone areas. He also expressed concern about a possible surge in violence from the CPP/NPA as it engages in its "usual" extortion from political candidates desiring to campaign in CPP-NPA areas. He said

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that Task Force Usig members had been buoyed when President Arroyo noted their accomplishments during her January 31 speech on the occasion of the PNP's 16th anniversary. The President underscored that "the Filipino people are counting on you once again to safeguard the ballot and clamp down on guns and violence in the run up to the elections" and urged that "we must do everything in our power to crack down on political violence."

¶12. (U) General Razon reiterated that the Philippine government has a "firm policy of protecting democratic space and fundamental liberties," and would not tolerate "the persecution or elimination of radicals, journalists or opponents."

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